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SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH
1530 Sixth Avenue, North Birmingham Industrial District
Birmingham
Jefferson County
Alabama

HABS NO. AL-898

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

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Location: 1530 Sixth Avenue, North at Sixteenth Street, North, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama. The Sixteen Street Baptist Church is located just on the outskirts of center city Birmingham in an area that once represented the heart of the African-American Business district. Across Sixth Avenue to the southeast is the newly erected Civil Rights Institute. Across Sixteenth Street from the Institute and catty-corner from the church is Kelly Ingram Park, originally called West End Park and designated for the use of black citizens.

Present Owner: The congregation of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church

Present Use: Baptist Church

Significance: The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church has served most of this century as the religious and cultural center of Birmingham's African-American community, and now also, as a landmark to Birmingham's Civil Rights District. Built in 1909-11, it was designed by Wallace A. Rayfield, a graduate of Howard University and Pratt Institute, and the first African-American to establish an architectural practice in Birmingham. The church was erected in an eclectic style reminiscent of Byzantine and Romanesque forms by successful African-American contractor Thomas C. Windham.

Located downtown near the former center of the African-American business district, Sixteenth Street Church has been known throughout its history as "everybody's church." Many distinguished Americans such as Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, Jackie Robinson, Marian Anderson, Mary McLeod Bethune and W.E.B. DuBois were heard there. The church began to receive national attention in 1963 when it became the principle site for organizing civil rights demonstrations led by the Reverends Fred Shuttlesworth and Martin Luther King, Jr. The Bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that killed four young girls attending Sunday School resulted in the national and international condemnation of segregation.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date: The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was erected in 1909-11, on the site of a former church by the same name that was built in 1884.

2. Architect: The church was designed by African-American architect Wallace A. Rayfield, the first African-American to establish an architectural practice in Birmingham. Rayfield was the architect of Birmingham's African-American middle class; he designed numerous residences in areas such as Smithfield, a suburb of Birmingham in which could be found many parishioners of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

Wallace A. Rayfield was born in Macon, Georgia on May 10, 1874. His mother died when he was twelve years of age, and he was sent to Washington, D.C., to live with his aunt.¹ In Washington, Rayfield enrolled in the Preparatory Department of Howard University. He obtained a Bachelors of Science degree from the Classical Department on 1896. While pursuing his studies at Howard, Rayfield worked for two years for the firm of A.B. Mullett & Company, architects. A.B. Mullett is best known as the supervising architect of the Treasury Building and for the designing of the State, War and Navy Building, also known as the Old Executive Office Building. Mullet served as a mentor for Rayfield, and provided him with his first practical experience in architecture.²

From Howard University, Rayfield went to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York; after two years of further study, he received a certificate in architecture in 1898. Rayfield spent another year at Columbia University where he received his Bachelors in Architecture in 1899.³

Having completed his studies, Booker T. Washington invited Rayfield to teach architectural drawing at Alabama's Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, an all-black college. Rayfield must have considered the position quite an accomplishment; Tuskegee was where many early African-American architects got their start, either as students or faculty members. Some years prior, Booker T. Washington had recruited Robert R. Taylor, who was among the first African-Americans to graduate in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to develop the mechanical industries department. In his role as department head, Taylor and his carefully recruited faculty became mentor to many successful African-American architects of the day.

In his position at Tuskegee, Rayfield helped launch other successful careers in architecture; among his students were William Sidney Pittman and Vertner W. Tandy, both nationally recognized African-American architects. When he was unable to secure a desired raise, Rayfield left Tuskegee in 1907, at the consternation of Booker T. Washington. Washington did, however, write him a glowing recommendation, stating "He was a valuable man....His qualifications are such as to fit him for doing any work of an architectural nature that he accepts. I am glad to bear testimony to this effect."⁴

After leaving Tuskegee, Wallace Rayfield went on to Birmingham, Alabama, where he established the first African-American architectural practice in the state (with the exception of Robert R. Taylor's work at Tuskegee). Much of Rayfield's work was in the design of churches, the best known of which was the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Rayfield also designed the (old) Sixth Avenue, South Elyton Baptist, and First Congregational Churches in Birmingham. In 1909, he was selected as the official architect for the A.M.E. Zion church, in the United States and Africa, including all churches and parsonages. Rayfield's commercial commissions included the Dunbar Hotel and the Harriet Strong Undertaking Company building.

Rayfield also was responsible for the design of numerous homes of Birmingham's African-American middle class in suburban communities such as Smithfield, where many black professionals resided. His designs as seen in the Smithfield community--where Rayfield himself lived--encompass a wide range of styles popular during the early twentieth century such as Colonial Revival, Georgian, Craftsmen, and Bungalow. Many of his designs incorporated modern building materials popular during this era such as rock-faced concrete block for foundations and porch supports, clay-tile roofs, and stucco-over-brick exteriors. Elements range in style from gambrel to clay-tile hipped roofs, from Ionic and Doric columns to concrete block porch supports, from lunette to stained-glass windows. Examples of his work include the Springfield homes of Rev. T.S. Jackson, Dr. A.M. Brown, contractor R.A. Blunt, educator A.H. Parker, attorney E.S. Brown, and merchant John Coar, as well as the Fairfield homes of T.S. Strawbridge, A.G. Dobbins and the Smith-Gaston home. Rayfield also worked in areas outside of Birmingham; for example, he is credited with the designs of the Ebenezer Church in Chicago, Illinois, and a dormitory at the Haven Institute in Meridan, Mississippi.

During his many years practicing architecture in Birmingham, Rayfield was a mentor for a number of Tuskegee's (recent) graduates. He offered them employment, as Mullet had done for him in Washington. Two Tuskegee alums hired by Rayfield were, for example, Alphonso Reveron and Angel Whatts in the class of 1912. It was also at Tuskegee that Rayfield met his first wife, Jennie M. Hutchins of Clarksville, Tennessee, a graduate of the Industrial Department. She died in 1929. Rayfield remarried in 1932, wedding Bessie Fulwood Rogers. Wallace Rayfield died on February 28, 1941.⁵

3. Builder: The church was erected by Windham Brothers Construction Company, the oldest African-American owned and operated construction company in Birmingham. Windham Brothers Construction Company was established in Birmingham in 1895; the company maintained branch offices in Nashville, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Detroit. The Company is responsible for the construction of some of the most significant structures erected by the African-American, as well as the white, community in Birmingham. Their work included commercial and residential buildings. As the premier African-American construction company in Birmingham, Windham Brothers was the natural choice for the construction of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

Windham Brothers was established by Thomas C. Windham in 1895. Upon his arrival in Birmingham (from Arkansas) T.C. Windham already was said to have been a man of considerable wealth and skill as a builder and contractor. In 1897, he was joined by his brother, Benjamin L. Windham, who just graduated with honors from New Orleans' Leland University. Their construction company grew to be the most prominent African-American owned-and-operated in Birmingham; they produced some of its finest buildings. Their work includes the seven-story Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Company (ca. 1926-27), Sixth Avenue Baptist Church (1911), Trinity Baptist (1920), as well as the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (1911). Windham constructed the first African-American-owned bank in the state (and the second largest in the country)--also a Wallace Rayfield design--in 1913.

The company's residential work includes numerous homes in Smithfield where many of most prominent early twentieth-century black professionals resided, including Windham himself. He bought a block of the Smithfield development and built on it a fine brick mansion. Fronting on Eighth Avenue, North, the house reflects both his wealth and talents as a builder. It supposedly "featured the best contemporary craftsmanship, including elaborately carved woodwork, stained glass, and fine furnishings."⁶ Touted as a man who delighted in "all the material trappings of the very rich of his day," his household included a full staff of servants and a uniformed chauffeur.⁷ As with the Sixteen Street Baptist Church, Windham Brothers often worked in conjunction with architect Wallace Rayfield on these homes.

The Windham Company also constructed their own office building, which included other family-owned businesses and two apartments. The building, located at 528 Eighth Avenue, was built ca. 1912. The company operated until 1966, when Lewis Windham, only son of Thomas Windham, died.

4. Original plans and construction: Rayfield's original plans for the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church are not known to exist. Historic photographs and other documentation, however, reveal few changes to the exterior of the church, with the exception of the reconstruction of the rear of the structure following the bombing. The interior has been rehabilitated recently, although the layout of the church remains intact. The altar originally consisted of a less-formal stage with the pipe organ and choir located in an elevated loft. Examples of other interior features of Rayfield's design that are no longer extant are the stained-glass windows.

5. Alterations and additions: On February 16, 1923 the headlines read, "Sixteenth Street Baptist Church is damaged by fire" "...gushing smoke in the rear of the building centering on the pulpit was seen by parishioners...the basement was damaged and quite a bit of repair is to be done...it is thought that a completed renovation and perhaps a re-arrangement of the basement will be made."

Prior to the bombing (ca. 1962) changes were made. These included the installation of a new center hall, partitioning of basement rooms, and new electrical wiring. Following the September 1963 bombing of the church, some reconstruction was necessary. The blast occurred in the basement of the church, and left a gaping hole to the rear. Almost all the stained-glass windows were blown out and had to be replaced. The most notable replacement was the "Wales Window," a gift from the peoples of Wales depicting Jesus Christ on the cross.

In 1991-92, rehabilitation of the church began. The L.L. Samms and Sons Company of Waco, Texas, undertook the job to restore the church to its initial beauty. The first phase of the rehabilitation consisted of updating and improving the systems including new heating and air conditioning. At this time, carpeting was added as well as an elevator in the southeast bell tower to provide access to the handicapped. The pews in the main

sanctuary and the seats in the mezzanine were refinished as was the paneling surrounding the raised pulpit and choir loft. The paneling and railings along the mezzanine were replaced. The baptistery was moved to the altar area. The pipe organ also was restored. Phase two included repairs to the lower auditorium, repair and/or replacement of windows, updating the wiring and sound systems, and the restoration of the memorial nook. The third and final phase consisted of exterior repair and painting, and outside lighting. At some point, minor restructuring of the altar area occurred, resulting in the lowering of the pipe organ and choir seats, which appear in a loft in a 1948 photographic view.

B. Historical Context:

History of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church

The "First Colored Baptist Church of Birmingham"--later Sixteenth Street Baptist Church--was founded in 1873 by the Reverends James Readen and Warner Reed, and, as the name implies, was the first organized church for African-Americans in Birmingham. Without a proper structure in which to hold services, the congregation's first meetings were held in "Mr. Paul's Tinner's shop" at Twelfth Street and Fourth Avenue.⁸ It was a fairly quiet location in the then just emerging city which spread out only a few blocks in any one direction. But as they brought new members into the fold, the congregation quickly outgrew their quarters. Thus, within two years, they purchased a lot on Third Avenue, between Nineteenth and Twentieth Streets (this would later become the site of J. Blach & Sons Department Store. Here, the members of First Colored Baptist constructed an unassuming frame structure in which to conduct services.

As the city of Birmingham rapidly expanded, the area surrounding the church became increasingly commercial. Succumbing to the pressures of development, the congregation opted for a larger, more residential location. In July 1882 the trustees of the First Baptist Church purchased the current site from the Elyton Land Company, tasked with laying out expansions to the growing City of Birmingham. From virgin territory on the east side of town, four contiguous lots were purchased. The lots extended north from Sixth Avenue on Sixteenth Street 150' to an alley, and west on Sixth, 100' (to which would later be added adjacent lots to the west and north).⁹ Here was plenty of room to erect a proper structure.

A Map of the City of Birmingham, drawn for the Elyton Land Company in 1888, seems to indicate that the city was developing along distinct racial boundaries. The majority of "white" churches were located along a central corridor aligned with Capital Park, while the "colored" churches were dispersed to either side (east and west) of this central location, on the outskirts of what was then the city center.¹⁰ Clearly, the congregation was moving into the areas designated, if not officially, for the "colored" population of Birmingham. Another map of the same date shows the configuration of structures with the names of owners and/or businesses, indicating that the area around the church was quickly developing into a residential section of town.¹¹ Many of these were,

however, less substantial structures, identified on the Sanborn Insurance Company maps as "Negro shanties."¹² At least from a planning standpoint it would appear that attempts were made to provide the amenities offered in other areas of town such as a reservation for the colored "West End Park," later renamed Kelly-Ingram Park. In fact, the congregation of the First Colored Baptist Church had advantageously selected a location catty-corner from this park.

With the purchase of these lots, and the confidence that this would remain their permanent home, the congregation renamed the First Colored Baptist Church of Birmingham the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and a brick structure was erected under the pastorship of the Reverend W.R. Pettiford (pastor 1883-1893). This rather dignified pile was a symbol of how far this determined group of African Americans had come since emancipation for many of its members represented the upper class of that society. According to a period account of the new church written by John W. DuBose for *Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama; Historical and Biographical*:

This is a brick edifice....and an imposing style of ecclesiastical architecture. Reverend W.R. Pettiford is the pastor, and the church is in a highly prosperous condition. Mr. Pettiford has retained his charge since January 15, 1883, and under him the present beautiful church building has almost been completed. The history of the church building is one of honor to the pastor and his people. With only \$300 in the treasury they went on with laying the foundations, and step by step, with hard work and grievous delays, accomplished their purpose. The church has cost \$6,000, and will, when fully completed, cost \$8,500. The lot is worth about \$10,000, or better. There are about 400 members of this church, and four (railway) stations are also conducted by it.

This structure, completed in 1884, was designed in the Gothic Revival style customary for ecclesiastic buildings of the period. As was typical of the style, variety of materials and irregularity in massing created a picturesque effect, with the entry and bell tower as the focal point, situated at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Sixteenth Street. Details included pointed-arched doorways and windows (single and in groups of two and three), stepped buttresses, and a large quatrefoil window.

Despite its stature, and renovations totaling over \$2,000 (ca. 1900), weaknesses in this structure lead to plans for a new church by 1908. In 1909, the city condemned the old church building, forbidding the congregation to even enter. Thus, with the financing yet uncertain, the selection of an architect and builder must have been the least complicated part of the process for the firmly middle-class congregation. They selected Wallace Rayfield, the premier black architect of the city--in fact the first African-American to open an architectural practice in Birmingham. Rayfield had come to Birmingham from Tuskegee Institute in 1907, where he held a position teaching architectural drawing. Rayfield was also highly regarded by his mentor at Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington, who

had supplied him with a letter of recommendation upon his departure. In the few years since his arrival in Birmingham, he had already built a number of residences for various members of the congregation in segregated neighborhoods such as nearby Smithfield. He had also been selected, in 1909, as the official architect for the A.M.E. Zion church, in the U.S. and Africa, including all churches and parsonages. Thus, his qualifications were considerable.

Likewise, Windham Brothers Construction Company was the oldest, best known, and probably the largest, of the black- owned-and-operated construction companies in the city. T.C. Windham was a member of the congregation, and, at one point, a chairman of the Board of Trustees. Windham constructed many of the most significant buildings in the black community, as well as the white. In addition, Rayfield and Windham Brothers already had worked together on a number of other projects, and would continue to do so.

On March 8, 1909, as funds continued to be raised, a contract with Windham Brothers was signed. By April 1911, the roof was on, although the auditorium was not yet completed. The congregation was, however, able to utilize the building, holding services in the finished basement of the church. Thirty-five thousand had been spent on the construction of the church, fifteen thousand of which had not been paid.

When the new church building was dedicated in 1911 it was the largest, most prestigious black church building in the Birmingham area. The prominence of the structure--a reflection of the stature of its congregation--coupled with its size and downtown location made Sixteenth Street Baptist Church a focal point for various activities in the black community. It was the only large centrally located black-owned edifice in the city. Thus, the church became a social center for the black community, encouraging education and the arts with a lively program of guest lecturers and entertainers. Meetings to discuss issues of importance to the black community were held at Sixteenth Street as well. As stated in a Birmingham Reporter, in 1921, "The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church is one of the most prominently located churches in the district and has among its members some of the most successful business and professional men of the race.... for a long time considered as a community center and perhaps the most attractive and substantial programs for the community uplift...."13

In fact, the meetings and speakers in the program the year that article appeared covered a wide spectrum of interests. In the field of the arts were a violin & piano recital by Targee DeBose, Howard University Professor, and a lecture by William Leo Hansberry, Fellow of African Research, on African antiquities. In the field of education, appeared John Hope, president of Morehouse College; and educator and activist, Mary McLeod Bethune. Politics, both local and national were debated at Sixteenth Street including, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) meetings--one to discuss paying pole tax, and another upon the return of the delegation to Republican National Convention--were held; as was a meeting of the suffrage league. They also met upon occasion to discuss issues of concern to the black community such as a lecture entitled

"Segregation of Negroes in Church Causes Alarm; Homes are Dynamited and Mass Meetings are Held."

The congregation of Sixteenth Street Church was, in fact, an enlightened group among the elite of black society in Birmingham. They appear to be both educationally and politically minded in the early twentieth century. Newspaper articles and editorials reveal a deep undercurrent of racial tension in Birmingham only hinted at in the minutes of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. As the March 17, 1923 editorial which appeared in the *Birmingham Reporter* questions, "Are the Negroes Wanted in the Birmingham District?," which explains, "The city of Birmingham, by its commissioners, has adopted an ordinance requiring partitions and separate entrances for two races on all street cars operated in Birmingham....Already the cars have separate and distinct seats for both white and colored...." Racially motivated bombings and fires set on the part of white supremacists were known to occur in Birmingham, such as the 16 July 1921 fire which destroyed the home of Dr. Thompson, a black doctor who was warned to leave his home because it was located too close to a white neighborhood.

Thus, the middle and upper middle-class black congregation, as the successful professionals and businessmen of the community, were forced to walk a thin line between maintaining their stake in the community and concerning themselves with the plight of their race. Making it in the white-man's world, particularly in Birmingham, placed them in an ever precarious position. The threats were as real as their desire to succeed. As with most black churches, because the happenings at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was one aspect of life under their control, it was often the focal point of the community. The church provided for the emotional--and at times, physical--support of its members and the community at large, as well as providing spiritual guidance.

As with other black congregations, the notes from church meetings indicate a good bit of cooperation among its members. Repairs to the church, for instance, were made using donated or discounted materials with volunteer labor. Obviously, the parishioners felt they had a stake in the church and the welfare of its members. Often, charity extended beyond the congregation to those less fortunate blacks to whom they made contributions of food and coal. Thus, Sixteenth Street served the community in many regards. According to a November 20, 1920 editorial "The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church for nearly fifteen years stood as the one big institution for the molding of public sentiment in the Birmingham district. It is centrally located and should maintain the lead of its former history." (Reporter)

Civil Rights and Birmingham, Alabama

The Brown vs. Board of Education decision of 1954--while the first major victory of the civil rights movement--caused barely a ripple in the fabric of the racially segregated class system in Birmingham, Alabama. Although a local movement was slowly gaining

momentum, it would take recognition on a national level to force city commissioners and the white establishment to work towards any real change in Birmingham. Despite civil rights legislation and other victories elsewhere, Birmingham would remain one of the last strongholds of segregation in the South. Attempts to suppress civil rights movements in Birmingham--such as the 1956 injunction against the NAACP--were undermined by more grass-roots organizations.

Political action in the black community sprung from the church, reflecting the conviction of the movement, the basic need for equality, and the central role of the church within the black community. The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, pastor at Bethel Baptist Church, established the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) which supplanted the NAACP's leadership role in the civil rights movement in Birmingham. Although considerable headway was made by ACMHR over the next seven years, compromises negotiated by Martin Luther King and the black business elite in Birmingham in the Spring of 1963--though in the interest of ending violence--would undermine much of it. And in the end, violence in Birmingham would continue.

During the first half of the twentieth century, blacks constituted approximately forty percent of the population of Birmingham, Alabama, the highest percentage of blacks per capita of any city in the nation.¹⁴ Many had come to Birmingham in search of jobs in the city's iron industry, which was among the top in the nation. Faced with obstacles such as racial segregation, substandard housing, and low-paying jobs (or no jobs beginning in the 1950s with declines in the industry) many left for opportunities in northern cities such as Chicago.

Segregation and fear of white recrimination was not new to the Birmingham of the post World War II era. Still, having successfully fought back attempts at injustice and racism abroad (in the form of Nazi anti-semitism), black soldiers came home with a new sense of hope and confidence in the American democratic system. They had fought for their country and had thus earned their place in it. The sense of renewed faith felt by many blacks at the end of World War II was expressed in the words of Brother Thomas Wood, Sr., speaking at a meeting at Sixteenth Street in March 1944:

These are times when our minds are mutilated due to strange things, we need divine aid. Man is the maker of his environment and destiny.... When the boys return they are expecting to find many things for which they have been fighting. This is an age of expansion. There must be expansion in the hearts and minds of the followers of Jesus Christ. The improvement must be on the inside, and then we can see evidence on the outside. Do not limit yourself. We are working in a century that stands for progress. It is time for the Negro and especially the members of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to travel the road of progress. The world is crying for men who can see with the eyes of Christ... Under the inspiration of the Cross and the protection of

the flag, the American Negro can march on. Let America at its worst find us at our best.¹⁵

But the disappointment would be greatly felt once it became apparent that the "Jim Crow" laws established to enforce segregation and limited their involvement in the social justice system would remain firmly entrenched.

As it had since antebellum, the church was the only sphere of influence or opportunity for African American leadership roles within a white-dominated society. The church's leadership role expanded to concern itself not only with salvation in the afterlife, but also to address civil rights through improving the human condition here on earth.

In 1953 Fred L. Shuttlesworth, a young black minister and recent graduate of Selma University, left the First Baptist Church in Selma to accept the position as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham. Shuttlesworth, who had grown up in rural Jefferson county, was no stranger to Birmingham and the social injustices facing its black citizenry. In 1956, he was elected membership chairman of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He soon realized, however, that the black businessmen who controlled the local NAACP were ill-equipped to represent the black community. With too much interest in gaining the acceptance of the white community to jeopardize their hard-earned status (however limited), they were unwilling to risk confrontation. Quite the contrary was true for most blacks in Birmingham who, despite fear of recrimination, had little to lose by challenging the system.

Despite the circumscribed attempts of the black businessmen, the white community felt threatened by the NAACP and therefore had no intention of recognizing that organization. In fact, calling the NAACP a foreign corporation (charged with encouraging incidents such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott), Alabama Attorney General John Patterson successfully sought an injunction against the local NAACP in June 1956. This injunction would remain in effect until 1965. Their attempts at crippling the civil rights movement in Birmingham, however, would prove to be only a temporary setback.

Shuttlesworth and others, now more than ever, saw the need for a civil rights organization that was both in touch the needs of the black community and could fulfill a leadership role. In response, they formed the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). On June 5, 1956, the first mass meeting was held at Sardis Baptist Church before an audience of over 1,000, filling the church to overflowing. Reverend Shuttlesworth, along with Pastor R.L. Alford and Reverend N.H. Smith, Jr., lead the meeting. In the words of Reverend Shuttlesworth, "The Negro citizens of Birmingham are crying for leadership to better their condition....The only thing we are interested in is uniting our people in seeing that the laws of our land are upheld according to the Constitution of the United States."¹⁶ Shuttlesworth went on to say that they did not intend to follow the course laid out by the NAACP, which had proved ineffective. Unlike the NAACP, the tactic of the ACMHR was one referred to as "direct action," whereby they

defied local segregation laws, were arrested, and used the subsequent convictions to test the validity of the law in court. Thus, the ACMHR planned a more active approach to achieve integration, as espoused by movements that sponsored such campaigns as the Montgomery Bus Boycott.¹⁷

Although a church-based organization, promoting Christian morals and peaceful resolve, many of the more conservative black ministers in Birmingham did not feel that the ACMHR was acting within the realm of the church, and therefore, did not support the movement. Although the church always had been tasked with providing support to the community, this was, in fact, a broadening of the traditional role. What was needed now was strong central leadership within the black community in Birmingham, directed towards a larger goal of social justice.

Despite dissension within the black community, by 1959, ACMHR would claim 900 to 1,200 members, representing a cross-section of the black population in Birmingham, including the upper, middle and lower classes of the community. They differed from the black community as a whole in that almost all members were employed and nearly seventy percent were registered to vote. The common thread was the belief that God would help them in their cause to fight segregation.¹⁸ Shuttlesworth, its undisputed and charismatic leader, led "mass meetings" which were hosted by approximately fifteen various black churches in the Birmingham area on a rotating basis. It was during these Monday night meetings that plans were communicated, participants recruited, and solidarity within the movement promoted. Among the injustices challenged by the ACMHR were, segregated seating on buses, segregation of public schools, unfair hiring practices, and other forms of unjust treatment by both local government and business (such as the right to be served at downtown lunch counters).

Opposition to the ACMHR came from all areas of local government. Where logic would seem to prevail, officials resorted to their own interpretation of constitutional law. When the ACMHR argued that segregation on buses violated the Fourteenth Amendment, a Birmingham judge declared the amendment "null and void," on the grounds that southern whites who supported the confederacy were denied access to the ratification process. False arrests were another tactic used to deploy activists. Visiting ministers, viewed as co-conspirators, were arrested on bogus vagrancy charges. Illegal arrests occurred frequently, including numerous arrests of Shuttlesworth himself. Efforts were made at limiting black's political power through disenfranchisement by purging the registry of persons convicted of vagrancy, prostitution, gambling and drunkenness, and parents of illegitimate children. Furthermore, in what would seem to be a violation of freedom of speech and assembly, detectives from the local (white) police attended every mass meeting, wired with a microphone. Many who would have otherwise joined the movement were too intimidated by such tactics.

The leader of the opposition was a person who--ironically enough--was tasked with the protection of the citizenry of Birmingham, the commissioner of public safety, T. Eugene

"Bull" Connor. Attempts at integration met with violent reaction by white-supremacists groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, that went unchecked by local police and other officials. Bombings--including the bombing of Shuttlesworth's home--earned the city the satirical name of "Bombingham," and one integrated neighborhood the name of "Dynamite Hill." But much to the chagrin of Connor and others, each injustice acted upon members of the ACMHR and other civil rights protestors only served to confirm their position and to enlist others to their cause. Indeed, in light of the intense opposition and recrimination which the civil rights activists faced, their efforts are to be heralded as heroic.

Still, the black community was divided on many issues. Without the support of many of Birmingham's black ministers, a unified effort failed to emerge. Much of the lack of support was due to frustration over police intimidation and "news blackouts" made in an effort to keep Birmingham residents ignorant of the happenings of the movement. Admittedly, ACMHR members took great risk purely in associating with a civil rights group, much less involving themselves in the organization's direct action campaign. This was further aggravated by the fact that city officials were unwilling to negotiate on any of the issues raised by the movement.

With similar efforts going on in other cities in Alabama, the need for a larger geographic association arose. In an endeavor to coordinate efforts on a statewide basis, local leaders such as Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, Martin Luther King in Montgomery, and Joseph Lowery in Mobile formed an association in 1956, from which developed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), in February 1957. This organization was a great source of information and strategy for Shuttlesworth, which he used in leading the efforts of the ACMHR.

The ACMHR's first strike was against the segregation of seating on public transportation. Shuttlesworth received no response to a written request to end such practices, but decided to wait for further action pending the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court regarding a federal injunction on bus segregation in Montgomery. (In the meantime turning his attention toward the effort to allow blacks on the police force). Although the court decided in favor of desegregation in December 1956, lawmakers in Birmingham claimed the decision applied only to Montgomery. When they failed to enact the new law, Shuttlesworth executed his own elaborate bus desegregation attempt (armed with information regarding the Montgomery Bus Boycott gained through a SCLS workshop). The resulting arrests would be used to test the laws validity in Birmingham. Twenty-one blacks were convicted, pending an appeal to the state which was held up through October 1958, when the ACMHR attempted a second challenge to the segregated seating law in Birmingham. Shuttlesworth's efforts did not come without a price; on Christmas night 1956 his home was bombed. Shuttlesworth's survival--and that of his family--was taken as a sign of divine intervention; "God saved the Reverend to lead the movement."¹⁹

By September 1957 Shuttlesworth had taken up a new cause. He sought to enroll four black children in Birmingham's largest all-white high school in--three years after the

supreme court had decided the Brown vs. Board of Education case. Although he expected to be turned away, he did not anticipate the violence that followed, and the lack of police protection. He now knew the potential for violence against the movement, and the weight of the task before him.

In 1958, while the federal court was hearing the case of the twenty-one blacks arrested in 1956 for attempting to desegregate Birmingham's buses, Shuttlesworth challenged the segregation of the city's recreational facilities. Despite white outcry, the city closed down these facilities rather than integrate. A bus boycott in October 1958 met with limited success, in part due to a news blackout that hindered the flow of information to prospective participants as well as to the concerned public. Reverends Shuttlesworth and Phifer were among the arrested, each received a ninety-day sentence which the ACMHR again appealed, further delaying an decision.

Early in 1960, a black student movement got underway throughout the South. Shuttlesworth met with a group of interested students from Miles College to discuss the potential for the movement within Birmingham. It was decided, as their first effort, a "round-the-clock prayer vigil" on behalf of "democracy, fair play and voting rights" be held. These activities corresponded with a debate going on in Congress over a civil rights bill that would later become the Civil Rights Act of 1960.²⁰ The vigil, which began in Kelly Ingram Park--the "colored" park separating the black community (and Sixteen Street Baptist Church) from the downtown business district--met with arrests and violence. Subsequent attempts, therefore, took the form of sit-ins of groups of two at local department store lunch counters, where service to blacks had been denied.

The sit-ins, though of limited success, resulted in national press, that outraged the white population of Birmingham. The New York *Times* article described a city "fragmented by the emotional dynamite of racism."²¹ Negative press had been surfacing for some years, such as a *Time* magazine article entitled "Birmingham; Integration's Hottest Crucible," which appeared in December 1958 warning, "the death of leadership, the silence of fear, the bomb blasts of hatred" contributed to Birmingham's being "the toughest city in the South."²² This negative publicity, posing a threat to the industrial recruitment sponsored by big business, would eventually contribute to white participation in deliberations with the black community.

Although alerting the nation to the racial problems in Birmingham, the attention brought on by such articles also elevated racial tension. Bull Connor addressed hundreds at a meeting of the Selma Citizens Council, claiming "they (the ACMHR) don't want racial equality at all. The Negroes want black supremacy!" He also claimed that Shuttlesworth and others would stop at nothing "in their fight to mix the races."²³ As previous, Connor's statements only served to promote violence--and, conversely, strengthen the resolve of the movement.

On May 17, 1961, Shuttlesworth and others participating in the Freedom Rides were arrested on charges of "conspiring with unknown persons to cause a mob to gather at the Trailways Station." The Freedom Rides were an effort to challenge a 1948 ruling on segregation of interstate travel, in which blacks and whites rode together between various Alabama cities. The riders were met with severe attacks by angry mobs. Adequate police protection was conspicuously absent. Shocked by what was happening, the U.S. Attorney General ordered an FBI investigation. The next violent attack on the Freedom Riders--involving federal marshals and Alabama Guardsmen--included the attack of Kennedy's assistant, John Seigenthaler.

Where bus and local business boycotts failed, the threat of economic reprisal and attention from the national press and the Federal government met with some success. By late 1961, representatives of the white establishment agreed to begin meetings with members of Birmingham's black business elite (evidently under the premise that money talks). Ironically, this select group of blacks had little influence over the ACMHR and associated civil rights groups. According to editor of the *Birmingham World*, many blacks attended these meetings just to see if the businessman could be trusted. Evidently, resentment was growing within the black community against this elite group "who have been unwilling to go to jail (through active participation) and who have never shown any interest in improving the lot of the Negro."²⁴ In fact, the now self-proclaimed leaders of the black community had opposed Shuttlesworth and his methods from the beginning. Therefore, they in no way represented the majority viewpoint. Although no settlement would be reached, discussions were being held for the first time.

In January 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court finally heard the ACMHR's 1958 bus desegregation case. Due to a technicality, the court refused to overturn the convictions of Shuttlesworth and Phifer, forcing them to serve their sentences. Martin Luther King, Jr., flew to Birmingham to speak out against the jailing of Reverends Shuttlesworth and Phifer in one his early visits to the city. In a mass meeting, held on Lincoln's birthday, King's speech was a foreshadowing of events to come, "I wish I could tell you our road ahead is easy....but it is not so. We have got to be prepared. The time is coming when the police won't protect us....we can expect the worst."²⁵ Through the efforts of King and a successful appeal on the part of lawyer, Arthur Shores, the two were released on March 2nd.

Also in January 1962, student protestors forming the Anti-Injustice Committee began month-long negotiations with white merchants in an attempt to end boycotts of downtown stores. Again, no settlement was made and the boycotts continued. The black businessmen called a meeting in an effort to unify the community. Stressing the need for conservative leadership, the businessmen suggested that with less than fifty percent of Birmingham's black population supporting the ACMHR, Shuttlesworth did not represent the black community. No headway was made. Instead, the city commission met the boycott of downtown stores with a boycott on a federally funded surplus food program, most of

the recipients of which were black. Outrage led to nationwide offers of assistance, and support for the movement grew.

With the nation's eyes turned towards Birmingham, Shuttlesworth recognized that the time was right for dramatic action. He asked Martin Luther King, Jr., to hold the annual SCLC convention in Birmingham. Fearful of the emotions that would be aroused by King's powerful oratory, as well as the media attention that the nationally recognized leader would command, further attempts at negotiation were made. An interracial group, the Senior Citizens Committee, appointed by the Chamber of Commerce was asked to continue discussions. As a result, some merchants agreed to begin desegregation of stores. Once the conference was over, however, Bull Connor began harassing those merchants who had participated.

At first reluctant, King began to see the potential for success in Birmingham. He knew his presence would attract the media. The relative unity of the Birmingham movement, coupled with the extreme force of Connor, who could be counted on to react violently, insured national attention. This, in turn, would force federal intervention, a boon to the movement nationwide. In late 1962, King had asked Wyatt Walker of the SCLC to formulate a "blueprint" for the "Birmingham campaign." In a secret meeting held on January 10, 1963 in Dorchester, Georgia, the two met with nine others including Birmingham reverends Shuttlesworth and Joseph Lowery and officials of the SCLC to discuss implementation of the plan. Dorchester was chosen because of its history as the only Puritan enclave in the slave south. The plan--labeled Project C, for confrontation--escalated in proportions, from sit-ins and boycotts to marches, culminating with outside help (i.e., King) to "descend on Birmingham," bringing with it national publicity.²⁶ Shuttlesworth was ahead of the game, with sit-ins and boycotts long underway.

The day after Connor's reelection, April 3, 1963, King and the SCLC joined the ACMHR and the Miles College students in a protest against segregation in Birmingham. At the same time, the sit-ins continued. On April 6th, Shuttlesworth led a mass march on city hall but was stopped by police after a few blocks. Despite arrests, King led a second, though not well attended, march the following day. Although most supported the boycotts, only about two percent were willing to participate in the marches. As promised, however, Connor's men received the protestors with police attack dogs. What would have been an unsuccessful march received great attention when a boy fell victim to a canine attack in front of a crowd of onlookers.

King next tried to recruit the black elite to the movement at a meeting held April 9, 1963. Although unable to convince many from the black middle class to join the movement, King alone was able to receive the additional support of two middle-class churches through its ministers Cross and Porter. The Reverend John Cross was the minister of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham's oldest and richest Negro church, and so, the equivalent of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church that was King's home church.²⁷ Because of its size and location--across from Kelly Ingram Park and the business

district-- the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was the staging area for many demonstrations. The other church was the Reverend John Thomas Porter's Sixth Avenue Baptist, one of Birmingham's largest black churches.

King was able to enlist a segment of the black community that had been unwilling to advance Shuttlesworth's movement. Their support was important if the movement was to appear unified. From this elite group of blacks, King appointed an advisory committee with authority to discuss the demands of the movement. With the views of the black elite clashing with those of the ACMHR, King stood in the middle. Despite attempts by city attorneys to file an injunction against the leaders of the movement, King organized another march on city hall on April 12th. King's subsequent arrest resulted in acknowledgment from the Federal Government, and his "letter from Birmingham Jail" that justified the movement was circulated nationwide. Just hours after King's arrest James Bevel, the foremost preacher among the SNCC students, spoke at a mass meeting at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Upon seeing two white police detectives in the audience Bevel asserted, "The police can come to our meeting, bring their guns and their badges and little microphones to church, but if you want to be free, there is nothing they can do about it."²⁸

Fearful that the press would leave town once King was out of jail, they sought new ways to carry the movement. It was suggested that they use the school children for whom there was less fear of recrimination, and a seemingly limitless supply. In June 1961 Shuttlesworth had launched a program designed to teach nonviolence to the children of ACMHR members. In special training sessions, they learned the techniques of direct action. This effort would now apparently bear fruit. Hundreds of school children filled the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on May 2, 1963 in preparation for the next march. Although arrested, their numbers exceeded the capacity of the city jail. Realizing the potential, Connor ordered officers out in force for the next march. As the peaceful demonstrators gathered in Kelly Ingram Park amidst firemen and police with attack dogs, unfortunately so did a rowdy crowd of blacks. As bricks and bottles were hurled at police, Connor gave the order, and the fire hoses and dogs were unleashed on the protestors. Birmingham's "underclass" had joined the movement.²⁹

Upon seeing photographs of the incident in the morning news, President Kennedy sent Burke Marshall to negotiate a peace. On May 5th, Marshall met with the city's merchants who later met with the black Advisory Committee to discuss the movement's demands. While they agreed to desegregation of stores and equal employment opportunities for blacks, they refused requests to free protestors and create an interracial committee to, among other things, schedule the removal of all city ordinances on segregation. The following day, hundreds more school children emerged from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to again march on city hall; and again the jails were filled beyond capacity. The next morning, the protestors marched on the downtown business district. Upon leaving Sixteenth Street Church, however, a second wave of protestors were met by Connor's men. Shuttlesworth, a victim of high-powered fire hoses, was among those taken to the hospital. Governor Wallace authorized the drilling of state

troopers in Kelly Ingram Park, and Bull Connor instructed his men to padlock the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. The violence continued.

With Shuttlesworth in the hospital, the Advisory Committee of elite blacks met with the white Senior Citizens Committee, along with Burke Marshall and a representative of the mayor's office. The whites undoubtedly were spurred by Kennedy's threats to declare martial law in Birmingham. King was fearful that violent retaliation on the part of a small segment of blacks to Bull Connor--as recently witnessed-- would undermine the nonviolent, direct action policy of the movement and tarnish King's image.³⁰ A vague understanding was reached. King joined the black elite in endorsing the agreement and the demonstrations were ended.

Shuttlesworth, who was convalescing at the A.G. Gaston Motel, was furious when he learned of the agreement. For seven years he had led the movement along its course towards ending segregation in Birmingham. They had called it off without his consultation, stopping short of the goals of the movement. Shuttlesworth had unwittingly surrendered his power to King and the black elite of Birmingham, who were not the active participants of the movement. Thus, King inadvertently had decided the balance of power within the black community in Birmingham; it had shifted from the people to the elite.

On the national level, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) charged King with having sold out to the white establishment in Birmingham. By the end of 1963 the differences between the SNCC and SCLC were made public, and the civil rights movement was no longer unified.³¹ In summer 1963, prior to his assassination, President Kennedy proposed what became the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ending segregation. The underlying truth, however, was that the nation was unwilling to wholeheartedly accept racial equality.

Violence, by both the Ku Klux Klan and the angry African American underclass in Birmingham, resulted in more bombings and riots. Amidst all the anger and brutality the greatest tragedy would befall the innocent: four young girls attending Sunday School.

The Congregation of Sixteenth Street & the Civil Rights Movement

The congregation of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was, and to some extent still is, comprised of the black professional and middle class of Birmingham. As opposed to the smaller neighborhood churches, Sixteenth Street was centrally located in the downtown area, with its congregation coming from all (black) areas of the city. Its formation and attendance by the black elite caused it to be referred to in some circles as the "silk stocking" church. The impression of the church, in some respects, was one of awe. One member conveys her impressions of the church prior to joining herself:

When I first came (to Birmingham) it was my understanding that you don't bother with Sixteenth Street (Baptist Church) because most of the people who go to Sixteenth Street are professionals and they're the people with money and so we just assumed that this church was the (black) leadership of the city because they had most of the professionals and people with leadership ability in the church. I guess they come (to be) this way because of the attitude that people had of the church...32

Although not everyone had money, the leadership role played by the members of the church was assumed to carry over into other matters, at least early in the church's history.

Because of their position in the community, as professionals and businessmen, the congregation was less involved in the mainstream of the black community in Birmingham. With regard to the civil rights movement, the congregation of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church took a backseat to the numerous, smaller black churches actively participating in the movement. One congregation member explained it this way:

We were professionals, so we were afraid for our jobs. We supported the movement financially but as far as getting out there and marching and protesting, we did not do that because our jobs were a priority with us.33

Although the congregation allowed the church to be used for meetings and as a staging area for marches, it was with some reluctance. With regard to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s arrival in Birmingham, it was said that many of the black leaders did not want him to come, "They were afraid of the repercussions. It wasn't going to cause anything but trouble for us....He (King) came because he was brave enough."34 For others, the fear of recrimination was too great. Unlike many of the smaller churches involved in Shuttlesworth's movement, Reverend Cross of Sixteenth Street did not discuss or promote the movement from the pulpit.

This attitude was a product of the climate in which African Americans were forced to live in Birmingham, especially during the peak years of the civil rights movement, from 1956 to 1963. The Ku Klux Klan was free to roam any neighborhood in the city. Assaults and bombings went unchecked by local police. Some members of the current congregation at Sixteenth Street recall themselves, or their fathers, patrolling their neighborhood at night, armed, in order to ward off potential bombings and other violent acts. They could not count on the police for protection. In fact, the police could stop black citizens on the street--or even arrest them--with the slightest provocation. There were numerous places they could not go, such as restaurants and hotels. There also were separate libraries, schools, parks, theaters, and churches for blacks and whites. Some white-owned stores served African Americans, but only after every white person in the store had been helped, even if the whites had come in later. They faced inequality at every turn. As one member of the Sixteenth Street congregation put it, "Living in Birmingham during that time you learned to cope, you learned to survive, without letting it upset you too much."35

Like any loving parent, the parents of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church tried to provide the best environment they could for their children. Perhaps it was the privilege of their class that they were able to somewhat shelter their children from the realities of life in Birmingham, or learning to live within the stated boundaries. For many of the adult members of the congregation who were children during the movement, some things were not discussed. Events like the patrolling of neighborhoods by black residents was just a fact of life. Hatred was not productive. In fact one member who was fourteen and present for the bombing said she thought that the United States was at war, that the Russians had invaded Birmingham.

Mention of civil rights issues, the visits by Martin Luther King, Jr., and other events leading up to the 1963 bombing are conspicuously absent from the church minutes. However, the discussion of appointing two night watchmen for fear of reprisal and/or further bombings is present.³⁶ Generally speaking, the congregation continued to discourage "trouble" at Sixteenth Street. Attitudes changed somewhat after the 1963 bombing. In the minutes from August 4, 1965 "Reverend Cross made mention of the request by Mrs. Hoover and Mr. Blackwell, Secretary and Program Chairman of the SCLC, to meet at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church because of its capacity and facilities." He previously had rejected their requests. The congregation moved to reverse that decision. Mrs. Maxine McNair, whose only child Denise was one of the four girls killed in the 1963 bombing, made a motion that the church extend and approve the request to meet on the stated date, or at any other time. A lengthy debate followed, but the motion was seconded by Bros. Henry J. Williams and S.E. Oned. Brother Charles Brown attempted to calm the controversy by saying "In spite of fear, trust in God, let them come on." A standing vote was taken nineteen for and fourteen against with some abstentions.

September 15, 1963

Three months had passed since Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led his civil rights marches from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. It was early September 1963. Federal Court order had just mandated the admittance of the first five black students into three of Birmingham's previously all-white schools. In an effort to stall compliance, Birmingham Mayor Boutwell sought a last-minute delay pending the consideration of new information. That night a bomb hit the home of Arthur Shores--black attorney and civil rights advocate--resulting in further demonstrations and violence. Upon receiving a protest telegram from King, President Kennedy intervened, withdrawing the Alabama guard troops Governor Wallace had sent to Birmingham to bar the students entry. The following week was one of tension as protests resulted among students both for and against integration. That Sunday, September 15, 1963, was the annual Youth Day at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

The sun streaked through the stained-glass windows of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on the morning of September 15th as the children anxiously prepared for the youth activities. Four young girls--Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, Denise McNair, and Addie Collins--particularly were excited; they were among the choir members and those chosen to

serve as ushers. Gathered in the ladies lounge located in the lower auditorium, the girls were talking amongst themselves as they as admired each others white dresses, purchased especially for the occasion. As she passed the lounge, Mamie Grier--Church School Superintendent and elementary teacher to two of the girls--heard the girls in the lounge. She stopped in to chat, urging them to hurry as she started up the stairs. She was the last to speak to any of them (Grier).

Elsewhere in the church, both adult and child Sunday School classes were in session; the subject of that day's lesson was "Love." Suddenly, at 10:19 A.M., there was a loud explosion. The events that followed were a blur to many who experienced them; some were in a state of shock. It was as if confetti was falling through the air as dust and bits of plaster filled the room. Those who attempted to exit through the back of the church discovered that the back stairway no longer existed, adding to the panic felt by many as they filed out the front door and into the streets. A state of confusion followed as ambulances arrived to take away the injured. Others wandered the area, riddled with glass, in search of family members and friends.

Grier was told that her husband had gone to University Hospital in the first ambulance, but the extent of his injuries was not known. Maxine McNair searched futilely for her only child, Denise, until her father told her the news "She's dead, baby. I've got one of her shoes."³⁷ Sarah Collins, ten years of age, appeared through the hole in the wall, partially blinded and bleeding from the nose and ears. Her sister, Addie Mae, had not fared so well. Some twenty persons were taken to University Hospital, which had become a "noisy blur of shrieks, hymns, television cameras, and shouted orders from crowd-control guards."³⁸ Claude Wesley, principal of Lewis Elementary School, had dropped his daughter, Cynthia off at the church before running errands that morning. Upon hearing the bomb blast he raced to the church, before going the hospital and finally the morgue where he and his wife identified their daughter's remains by her feet and a ring on her finger.

The Aftermath of the Bombing

A shock wave reverberated through both the black and white communities of Birmingham as news of the Sixteenth Street Church bombing spread. Governor Wallace sent in 300 state troopers in anticipation of reprisals. In fact, rioting and other forms of violence, as well as bomb threats on other black churches, followed. Firearms were openly displayed throughout the city, businesses were closed, officials barricaded the black neighborhoods while black residents patrolled against white intruders.

President Kennedy sent Burke Marshall, who headed up the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, to intervene. Upon arriving in Birmingham, both the local police and FBI agents were unwilling to risk escorting him to the "Dynamite Hill" neighborhood where Martin Luther King, Jr., preachers and other leaders of the black community were meeting at the home of John Drew. Burke Marshall finally was smuggled in. He was relieved to learn that no immediate demonstrations were planned and returned to

Washington, first assuring King and others that a full FBI investigation into the bombing would be undertaken. King stayed in Birmingham to give the eulogy at the funeral of three of the four girls.

Long-term reactions to the bombing were mixed. Some felt that the bombing played a part in bringing together whites and blacks in Birmingham. Many whites were as outraged by the incident as the blacks, and offered various services to the families, and to the church in general. New York *Times* reporter Howell Raines, then a student at a nearby all-white Methodist college stated "For us, it was an incident that exposed the madness of racism and illustrated the moral paralysis with which it had afflicted us."³⁹ Raines would later characterize the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church as "the most terrible incident of racial violence during the peak years of the Southern civil-rights movement...the most heinous act of the era."⁴⁰ Among the congregation of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, "Nobody ever voiced animosity toward anyone for this act. Instead we felt prayer for such an individual or individuals would be the proper thing to do, because we know that in the final judgment we aren't the judge..."⁴¹ As one member, Mamie Grier, put it "I really do feel that this was the beginning of a new Birmingham, so far as race relations were concerned."⁴² For some whites, however, attitudes hardened in response to accusations and reprisals from the black community, both real and imagined. Mayor Boutwell excused the incident with remarks such as "All of us (black and white) are victims."⁴³

A mass funeral was held on September 18th for three of the four victims--Cynthia Wesley, Denise McNair and Addie Collins--with the eulogy given by King; the parents of Carole Robertson felt the loss was too personal to publicize and instead allowed the Reverend Shuttlesworth to preside over their daughter's funeral. The funeral was held at Reverend John Porter's Sixth Avenue Baptist Church. Despite the threat of vigilantes and police patrols, 8,000 people attended the service, including 800 Birmingham pastors of both races.

The FBI investigation promised by Burke Marshall was less than successful. It still remains unclear whether the failure can be attributed to cover-ups or lack of sufficient or defensible evidence. In any rate, it was a botched effort which resulted in only one conviction, that of Klansman Robert E. Chambliss, on November 14, 1977, fourteen years after the fact. Investigations undertaken by state and city police, the Justice Department and the FBI were based largely on the testimony of female informants with Klan ties, including the wife of Robert Chambliss (unknown to him). Klansman close to Chambliss--assumed to be among the co-conspirators in this and other "unsolved" bombings--were some of the most violent in the deep south, a group known as the Eastview 13 Klavern. Eyewitnesses placed Chambliss, as well as Klansmen Thomas Blanton, Jr., Bobby Frank Cherry, and Herman Frank Cash, at the scene early that morning. This "significant breakthrough" on the part of the FBI was withheld by order of Director J. Edgar Hoover on the basis that chances for conviction were "remote."⁴⁴ The FBI investigation was, thus, stalled indefinitely.

Investigations at the local level were hindered by Colonel Albert J. Lingo, whom Governor Wallace had appointed to head the Alabama Department of Public Safety. Lingo, a Ku Klux Klan sympathizer, was convinced for some reason that the Black Muslims were responsible, and led his investigations accordingly. The more astute Sheriff's detective James Hancock, however, concentrated his efforts on interrogations of Chambliss and his associates. As it became apparent that Hancock was on the right track, Lingo took over the case, prematurely arresting Chambliss and other Klansmen on September 29th. After two days of questioning, Lingo was only able to file misdemeanor charges for possession of dynamite, which fell apart in court.

The case was reopened in 1971 by Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley, assigning the case to Detective Bob Eddy. The FBI files crucial to the case were not forthcoming; by 1975 the FBI was still refusing to share this information. Picking up on their reluctance to discuss informant Elizabeth Cobbs (Mrs. Chambliss's niece), Eddy sought her out himself. Baxley was then let into the circle of Klan informants, whose verified testimony would finally lead to Chambliss's long-awaited conviction.

Reconstruction

The long process of reconstruction began at the church in October 1963. A letter was sent to the building committee, formed to oversee the process, on October 1st by local members of the architectural profession offering services free of charge as may be required in the repair or reconstruction of the church. Following the meeting of the special conference of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church held at Poole Funeral Home on the 15th, the Building Committee, headed by Joseph E. Parrish, held a brief session to form a plan for the rebuilding. A settlement with the Centennial Insurance Company had been made. Other improvements beyond reconstruction were discussed and it was decided that some "brainstorming" was necessary, and specialists in the area of construction needed to be consulted.

A meeting was then held on October 29th during which basic specifications for reconstruction were determined. Concern had been expressed over the replacement of the rear doorway, evidently the entry point for the bombers. The local fire chief, however, informed them that a rear exit was required. The building committee had selected architects Nelson Smith and Stanley B. Echols to undertake plans for the reconstruction. It was decided that a letter of acceptance should be sent to them, as well as to the people of Cardiff, Wales, who wanted to commission and donate a replacement stained-glass window to the church. Discussion was also held regarding the purchase of lots adjoining the church, for the purpose of expanding the church structure; it was decided that an educational center (with recreational facilities) be erected in memory of the four girls.

The building committee was given the authorization to proceed with the restoration of the church during the November 19th meeting. The architects provided the committee with guidelines under which to hire a contractor and had recommended a cost-plus contract

(time and materials) since the full extent of the work would be difficult to determine prior to the necessary removal of debris. By November 22nd, a contractor had been selected, Leroy S. Gaillard, Jr. Mr. Gaillard expected to begin work Monday, November 25, 1963. The church furnishings--pews, organ, etc.--would be stored elsewhere, including the second floor of the church office, until the work was completed. During the reconstruction process, the area where the ladies lounge had been located and where the explosion killed the four girls, was walled in. This was due perhaps to structural damage, and perhaps to block out the bitter memories (Mamie Grier transcript, p. 19).

The re-entry service was held June 7, 1964, with various rededication services held August 9th, 16th, and 23rd. Many were apprehensive about re-entering the church; many describe an eerie feeling that came over them upon entering again for the first time. Although most did, some never returned to the church. On September 20, 1964, a memorial service was held at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to mark the one-year anniversary of the deaths of four girls. It was decided from that day forth, a service would be held every third Sunday of September in their memory.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church building exhibits an interesting eclectic of Romanesque and Byzantine styles, executed in warm, brown brick on a foundation of dark brown rock-faced sandstone. As characteristic of the Romanesque style, the church has a symmetrically balanced facade with towers and wide round-arch doorways and windows, and is executed in heavy masonry with rock-faced stonework with other textured, decorative details. An element of the Byzantine is added to this formula by the central dome resting on a tall drum and the two subsidiary domes located atop the front towers, which are reminiscent of the typical Byzantine "cross-in-square" church plan. Other Byzantine-influenced features include the polychrome brick and low-relief moldings.

The mixed style of the Sixteen Street Church is indicative of the period in which it was erected. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a wide range of styles came into popular use, largely revival styles which looked to historical precedents for inspiration. Many were adopted for church architecture, such as Gothic and Colonial, and the more exotic Romanesque and Byzantine, with nationality often playing a role in determining the style.

The size and multiplicity of functions of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church is representative of a trend started by the church congregation in the last third of the nineteenth century to extend its ministry functions to social and educational pursuits.⁴⁵ As seen here, its expanded plan and auditorium-like layout made the church equally suited to

the sermon and the lecture. In the basement are meeting rooms and offices, restrooms, and a large social hall for recreation and Sunday School.

The masonry structure rises from a rectangular plan with a raised basement finished in brownstone and a two-story sanctuary constructed entirely of brick. Bell towers flank the wide central stair that ascends to a single-story, three-bay loggia with arched openings, that projects out from the main body of the church. A raised brick pediment is set into the brick wall above the loggia. A stained-glass window depicting Christ on the cross is set within the single opening of the wall. A two-tiered cupola resting on a square drum and octagonal second tier, topped with an octagonal dome, appears to the center of the church.

The longitudinal sides of the church are divided into seven bays with arched, stained-glass windows set into six of the bays. The bays at the rear corners serve as access points to the offices of the church. The arched windows of the transept are larger than the other windows with images of Christ within the stained glass. The rear elevation is punctured by double-hung windows at three levels that service offices and rear halls of the church.

2. Condition of fabric: The church building is generally in very good condition, having undergone a complete rehabilitation in 1991-92. Physically, the church suffered little structural damage as a result of the 1963 bombing; minimal alterations were made in the subsequent restoration.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The church measures approximately 70' in width and 115' in length. The height of the parapet is about 45', with the towers extending to 60' at the peaks of the domes. The apex of the domed cupola is approximately 70' above the level of the sidewalk.

2. Walls: The church is a brick structure with walls varying in thickness of 2'-3" at the base, 1'-10" at the sanctuary level to 1' at the parapet. The base of the church, separated from the main body of the structure by a limestone water table, is of rock-faced ashlar Brownstone. A lighter hued brick was used as a finish brick on the Sixteenth Street (front) and Sixth Avenue facades. The parapets on the two street facades are capped with limestone. The building also includes patterned brickwork formed by recessed and protruding brick. Examples include the returned pediment laid out on the front facade, above which appear false round-arched windows. These features also appear in the pavilion at the side elevation. The parapet walls on the side facades are demarcated into panels by columns of brick, and by protruding brick in a rectangular pattern. The fenestration in the towers appear with a recessed panel formed by brickwork.

3. Structural system, framing: The church is of load-bearing masonry construction. Six metal trusses support the roof, with the framing for the cupola tied to two of these trusses. Ceiling joists span the distances between the trusses, holding up the plaster ceiling below. The ornamental dropped beams visible from the sanctuary correspond to the metal trusses above. Two additional longitudinal ornamental beams bear no correspondence to the structural framing above. The mezzanine is supported by 6" diameter metal columns. There was no way of determining the structural framing. The raked floor of the sanctuary is supported by a single row of 3" metal columns in the basement. Again, there is no way of determining the framing, but given the spans involved (approximately 30') it can be assumed that structural metal framing was used.

4. Loggia: Across the first story of the front facade, situated between the towers to either side, is a brick loggia composed of three round arches springing brick columns. Patterned brickwork, in the form of rectangles, appears above the arched openings.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are five exterior doorways at the basement level, three at the sanctuary level, and two that open onto the roof of the loggia. Five of the doorways are original: three that open onto the loggia from the sanctuary and towers, and two that open onto the roof of the loggia from the towers. The others are modern additions made after 1963. With the exception of the double glass doors which serve the basement from Sixteenth Street, the doors are modern, fire-rated doors with high-security locks.

b. Windows: The principal windows are the arched, stained-glass windows along the longitudinal sides of the nave, twelve windows in all. Ten are identical in pattern, and the other two depict different images of Christ and are larger in dimension. The windows are surrounded by an arched pattern of header brick, protruding along the outer edge, and have limestone lintels.

There are six small stained-glass windows--four arched and two rectangular-- with each of the two towers. Similar stained-glass windows are located in the sanctuary walls of the loggia. In addition, there are stained-glass transoms above the five original doorways, the most decorative of which is located above the main entryway, bearing the name "16th Street Baptist Church." Again, the arch windows have brick window heads and limestone lintels. The rectangular windows have limestone lintels and sills.

The windows along the base of the structure are arranged in pairs and are double hung one-over-one-light sashes with semi-opaque glazing. Similar windows exist in the rear elevation of the church, with completely translucent glazing. All have limestone lintels and sills. Four vented openings appear in the top levels of the towers. These are arched openings with wood slats set into the wood framing at a thirty-degree angle. Smaller vented openings appear in the transept in the attic.

6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The church has a flat roof covered with a composition of tar and gravel (which appears to be fairly new). The dome of the cupola is sheathed in red asphalt shingles. The domes of the towers are of clay tile and appear to be original to the structure. Metal roofs cover the vestibules in the front and the awnings over the side entrances.

b. Cornices, eaves: There is dentil molding in the cornice of the two towers.

c. Towers, cupola: Bell towers flank the wide central stairway at the front of the church. A two-tiered cupola resting on a square drum and octagonal second tier allows light to enter through a stained-glass skylight at the intersection (or crossing) of the nave and transept above the sanctuary. The cupola is topped with an octagonal dome.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan:

a. First floor: The first floor consists of a two-story sanctuary, open to the ceiling. The floor plan of the sanctuary (or auditorium) of the Sixteenth Street Baptist church is unusual in that there is no center aisle, and the layout of the seats form an arch. Most Baptist churches have a center aisle, representing the centrality of the gospel and its mutual benefit. The plan of Sixteenth Street reflects its use as an auditorium as well as sanctuary for religious services. The church was, in fact, the largest space in the city available to the black community, and was therefore often the site of lectures and meetings. The plan of the church is also unusual in that the gallery, or mezzanine, is located along the side walls as well as the rear wall, and is supported by narrow columns inter-dispersed among the pews of the sanctuary.

A set of arching steps lead up to the altar area, running nearly the full length of the altar. The elevated altar, with a central pulpit, is surrounded by wood paneled walls. Behind the altar is a sunken fiberglass baptism, and behind that is a large alcove housing the pipe organ and choir seats. Doorways at each corner of the sanctuary lead to the stairways. Behind the altar area and south of the alcove is the church office or finance room; north of the alcove is the pastor's study.

b. Mezzanine: The mezzanine, running along the south (rear), east and west walls, consists of three levels of seats. The mezzanine is accessible from the main sanctuary at the south and north ends of the church. A metal rung ladder anchored to the floor at the mezzanine level in the eastern bell tower leads to the unfinished attic, where the exposed rafters and skylights are visible.

c. Basement: There is a full basement divided into nine rooms/offices, a kitchen and two bathrooms, situated around a large central room. To the center of the room is an elevated platform, 15' x 5' x 2'. Along the south wall, between two entrance stairways, is a long partitioned room called the "Memorial Nook."

2. Stairways: There are three main stairways; the fourth main stairway, located in the west bell tower, was replaced by an elevator. There is a stairway to either side of the church, north and south, to the rear. These are single flight, enclosed stairways that lead to a corridor along the rear of the church. A shorter addition run of steps on the north leads to the basement auditorium, and on the south, to the mechanical room. There is an enclosed winder stairway in the east bell tower, which leads from the basement to the mezzanine, with entries at each level. There are short, single run stairways to either side of the choir loft, adjoining the rear of the loft with a corridor along the back of the church. There are also enclosed stairways leading out from the basement, to either side of the front steps and loggia.

3. Flooring: The floor of the main sanctuary is oak covered with red carpeting. The mezzanine is also wood covered with red carpet. The floor of the basement is concrete covered with linoleum tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are of unornamented plaster, painted white. The ceiling of the main sanctuary is coffered, painted white, with a large stained-glass skylight located between the coffered panels to the center of the room. Acoustical panels cover the ceiling. The basement has a dropped ceiling, also covered with acoustical tiles.

5. Doorways and doors: The doorways throughout the building are plain, without surrounds. The only doors that appear to be original are those in and around the choir stall and the back corridor that accesses this area and the study and office. Most of the doors are new as of the renovations of either 1964 or 1991-92.

6. Decorative features and trim: Other than the depictions of Christ in three windows, there are no religious symbols or other icons ornamenting the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Reverend Hamlin, the current pastor of the church, explains it in terms of two factors. First was the intent that the church be used by so many different groups, some religious, some secular. According to Hamlin, "It really became a multi-purpose building where, for secular purposes, people felt comfortable."⁴⁶ Secondly, the lack of religious symbolism seen at Sixteenth Street is typical of Baptist churches, particularly in the south. Unlike catholic churches, for instance, where you would typically see the twelve apostles depicted in the stations of the cross or in scenes on stained-glass, Baptist rarely display such icons. In fact, most Baptist churches do not have stained glass. They have either plain glass or some type of decorative glass where you would not be able to look in or out.⁴⁷

According to the Reverend Hamlin, this was probably both a reaction to the strict liturgy of Catholicism, and the age of enlightenment. "Especially for black Baptists whose liturgy is very loose, not rigidly refined as in your high liturgical churches. They stayed away from that. You go to many churches and the pulpit is very common and very plain; you may just see the pulpit and one or two chairs....the communion table....you don't see a lot of decoration."⁴⁸ Although Sixteen Street is relatively low-key in its ornamentation, it is more decorative than most black Baptist churches, perhaps an indication of its wealth and prominence.

The most decorative features of the church are its stained-glass windows. Only three of which depict religious scenes, and one other, writing; most contain organic or floral and/or polychromatic lights. The north and south side walls each have six two-story, round-arched windows; the third window on either side is larger and depicts images of Christ. On the north wall is depicted Christ as the good shepherd, a gift from Booker T. Washington. On the south wall is Christ in revelation 3:20, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." The front door has a round-arched stained-glass transom which reads "16th St. Baptist Church," and the fourth depiction is the Wales window located on the second story of the east (front) wall.

The Wales window was given to the church as a gift from the people of Wales who had learned of the destruction of the stained-glass windows during the 1963 bombing. Horrified by the event, they commissioned artist John Petz to design a replacement. Petz came to Birmingham in Fall 1963, staying at the home of Reverend Cross, to get a feel for Birmingham. His first design was of the new Jerusalem, conveying the hope that, as with Jerusalem, a new Birmingham would rise from the rubble. Instead, Petz chose a depiction of a black Christ, with his left hand raised in revolutionary protest, and the right, in reconciling loss. The black Christ is hanging from not a cross but cross beams. This is because in Baptist doctrine, Christ does not remain on the cross (as with Catholicism as represented by the crucifix). Relating what was happening in Birmingham with similar events in South Africa, there are bullet holes across the top beam and through the heart of Christ, for the children gunned down. Arrows also pierce the heart, a further indication of violence. The universality of the gospel is represented by the rainbow overhead. The words from the gospel (as you do it unto others) "You do it to me" appear along the bottom of the window.⁴⁹

According to Hamlin, this may be the only place in the South where Christ is pictured so prominently as being of African descent; this was a particularly bold statement in Birmingham of 1965 or when the window was dedicated. According to Reverend Hamlin the window serves another purpose; to him, the Wales Window looks into the face of human suffering at its worst. Thus the Wales Window is a reminder of his (Hamlin's) mission and helps him keep focused. Often when discussing human suffering in his sermons, he will ask the congregation to stand and look behind them at the depiction of Christ.

The Wales window was dedicated in a service held June 6, 1965. As stated in the program, this magnificent creation given to Alabama by the people of Wales is "now tangible and strong proof of a nation's horror and grief, and desire to contribute to a better understanding between races."

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views

B. Interviews

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Notes:

1 According to an article by Vinson E. McKenzie, head of the Architecture Library at Auburn University, another account states that Rayfield remained in the South until he was 16 years of age. He then when to Washington, D.C., to live with his aunt while attending Howard University.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Booker T. Washington, letter to whom it may concern, regarding Wallace Rayfield, Tuskegee Institute, 15 August, 1908, in "Wallace A. Rayfield, 1874-1941; A Pioneering African-American Architect in Alabama," Faith and Form, Vinson E. McKenzie, Fall 1993.

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7 Ibid.

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- 15 Thomas Wood, Sr., address given at special meeting of the church, 20 March 1944.
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- 32 Unknown member of congregation, Interview by Sharon Clarke, 27 July 1993.
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- 36 Minutes of church meetings, Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, 10 October 1966.
- 37 Branch, p. 889.
- 38 Ibid., p. 890.
- 39 Howell Raines, "The Birmingham Bombing," *New York Times Magazine*, 24 July 1983).
- 40 Howell Raines. *New York Times Magazine*, 24 July 1983, p. 12.
- 41 Grier, p. 23.
- 42 Ibid., p. 21.
- 43 Taylor, p. 891.
- 44 Raines, p. 23.
- 45 Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture*. New York: A Plume Book, New American Library, 1980, p. 146.
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IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service, Department of Interior as part of a long range program to document historically significant architecture, engineering and industrial works in the United States. The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church recording project was co-sponsored during the summer of 1993 by HABS and by the Birmingham Historical Society. The field recording team greatly appreciated the warmth and hospitality of the Reverend Christopher Hamlin and the congregation of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

The documentation of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was prepared under the direction of Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, HABS, Joseph Balachowski, HABS Architect, and Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS Historian. Members of the recording team were James N. Ferguson (University of Florida), Supervisory Architect; as well as Matthew J.M. Krahe (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University), Douglas J. Hervey (Auburn University), and Daina Knyviene (US/ICOMOS, Vilnius, Lithuania) who served as Architectural Technicians for the project. Large format photography was completed by Jet Lowe.